United Nations A/C.4/53/SR.20

General Assembly
Fifty-third session

Official Records

Distr.: General
11 February 1999
English
Original: Russian

Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee)

Summary record of the 20th meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Monday, 16 November 1998, at 3 p.m.

Chairman: Mr. Macedo ..... (Mexico)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Agenda item 86: Questions relating to information (*continued*) (A/53/21 and 509)

1. **Mr. Çarikçi** (Turkey) said that in the modern interdependent world it was more important than ever before to maintain and develop cooperation, mutual understanding and respect between all Member States, all of which required a free flow and exchange of accurate, complete and objective information. In that connection, the Turkish Government attached particular importance to the work done within the United Nations system regarding information and communications, especially the activities carried out by the Department of Public Information and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

2. Turkey had accumulated much experience in that field, and the level of development of communications in Turkey had enabled it to keep pace. At the same time, Turkey understood the aspirations and preoccupations of the developing countries in the information and communications field and appreciated the developing countries' need for assistance in building up the necessary communications and information infrastructure, for which free and more widespread dissemination of information were required.

3. Turkey attached great importance to the activities and effective functioning of the United Nations information centres, intensification of the links in the field between the Department of Public Information and the developing countries, training of journalists and broadcasters from the developing countries and the adoption of modern, more efficient technology for the preparation and dissemination of information materials. The report of the Secretary-General entitled "Questions relating to information" (A/53/509) showed that the significant progress that had been made in all those areas of the Department's work was the result of placing the communications function at the heart of the strategic management of the United Nations. In that connection, a number of general comments were called for. First, concerning the relationship between quality and quantity in the services provided by the Department and the resources allotted to its activities in the prevailing critical financial situation, it was evident that given the increased demand for public information the Department could not be expected to continue undertaking further responsibilities without additional resources. His delegation therefore believed that, with due respect for the principle of financing within existing resources, a solid financial basis commensurate with the Department's needs must be established and made available to it. Secondly, the priorities of United Nations information activities must be defined in the light of the issues before the United Nations system as a whole, with special focus on areas such as economic, social and cultural development, poverty eradication, human rights, peacekeeping operations, drug control, the threat of international terrorism and the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance. Thirdly, the function of the Strategic Communications Planning Group was becoming increasingly important in securing the necessary coordination between the various departments and agencies in the United Nations system, avoiding duplication in the field and carrying out joint projects and activities [approved at Headquarters].

4. **Mr. Zaki** (Egypt) said that his delegation supported the statement made by the representative of Indonesia on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. Egypt attached particular importance to the activities of the Committee on Information, which was responsible for developing appropriate policies in that area. He pointed out the need to adopt fresh approaches and ensure transparency in the Committee's work. He welcomed the results achieved by the Committee at its twentieth session. His delegation had noted with interest the information on establishing a United Nations international broadcasting service and wholeheartedly supported the innovative projects in that area. However, it was concerned about the delays in the work being carried out in that regard.

5. He expressed his delegation's gratitude to the Department for setting up a United Nations home page in Arabic which would allow people in Arab countries who were interested in the Organization's work to obtain the relevant information through that important channel. However, the traditional methods of broadcasting information — radio, television and the press — should not be forgotten. He called on the Secretariat to continue to take steps in that area also. He emphasized the importance of supporting the United Nations information centres in Member States. His delegation had taken part in the recent seminar on that issue and hoped that the Secretariat would take decisive steps to remove the difficulties being encountered by some information centres and in particular the problems arising out of the centres' merging with United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) field offices. Further, he pointed to the need to revitalize field activities, especially those relating to the question of Palestine.

6. **Mr. Tekaya** (Tunisia) expressed his delegation's support for the statement by the representative of Indonesia which had set out the position of the Group of 77 and China

on extremely important, information-related issues. As a result of scientific and technological progress in the field of information and communications, significant progress had been made which would help solve many social and economic problems and strengthen the foundations of democracy and liberty in the world's various countries. Within its overall policy framework, Tunisia had put information and communications at the top of its list of priorities. Further steps were being taken to increase the role of information in ensuring freedom of the press and of expression and in expanding the capacity of the appropriate bodies to exercise more effective control over information and communications activities. Also, the Internet was being used more and more actively in Tunisia's schools and offices, and Tunisia was keeping pace with technological progress in that field.

7. Information was playing an extremely important role during the current period of globalization, and it was to be hoped that the United Nations would make use of the opportunities that were opening up in that area to help strengthen peace, bring growth and prosperity to the world's peoples and achieve sustainable development. Unfortunately, the gap between the developed and the developing countries in the communications area was still extremely wide. The least developed countries were still not in any condition to make advantageous use of technological progress in communications to achieve stable development. In that connection, Tunisia called for solidarity to be shown with those countries and for partnerships to be developed with them. The Organization could play a very prominent role in that regard. The United Nations and UNESCO were making a major contribution to developing North-South cooperation and to increasing the capacity of the countries of the South in the information field.

8. With regard to the reorientation of the work of the Department of Public Information, which was envisaged in the reform programme proposed by the Secretary-General, the Department was making significant efforts to stay abreast with scientific and technological progress. It was making increasing use of the Internet, which opened out new possibilities for the dissemination of information. Tunisia hoped that those efforts would continue. He expressed appreciation to the Dag Hammarskjöld Library for the support it provided every day to the Permanent Mission of Tunisia. As to the Internet, he noted with satisfaction that recently the Department had created a home page in Arabic. That was yet another important achievement of the Department in its work during the current year. The Department must be provided with sufficient resources to enable it to expand the CyberSchoolBus project on the Internet, since that project was very popular with the general public. Lastly, with regard to the question of integrating the information centres with UNDP field offices, it should be noted that, in a number of resolutions, the General Assembly had particularly stressed the role which the information centres played in developing countries. Tunisia believed that the consideration of the matter should continue.

9. **Mr. Dausa** (Cuba) said that his delegation fully supported the statement made by the representative of Indonesia on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. Recently, as a result of technical progress, information and communications had acquired enormous significance, and they should become a useful instrument in the socio-economic development of all the peoples. Nevertheless, that progress, along with positive aspects, had a negative side too: the technological gap between the developed and the developing countries was steadily widening. The solution of that problem, of course, was not to reject the indisputable benefits of progress in those spheres, but to facilitate the advancement of the developing countries to a level of technological development at which they would not only be able to use those means, but also become full-fledged participants in the exchange of information.

10. The international community should make serious and consistent efforts to establish a new world information and communication order, which would make it possible to strengthen the technical potential of the developing countries. The United Nations, and specifically the Department of Public Information, could and should facilitate those efforts, and in that connection he welcomed the practical approach taken by UNESCO.

11. An even more important matter than the elimination of the existing technological gap and facilitation of the access of the developing countries to information on the Internet and the optical disk system was the preservation of the Organization's ability to disseminate information on its work through traditional channels, including the radio. In that connection, his delegation noted the discussion in the Committee on Information of the development of the United Nations international radio broadcasting capacity. While commending the efforts of the Secretariat in that sphere, his delegation noted that existing programmes should not suffer, and that such broadcasts should be directed in the first place towards the developing countries.

12. In view of the important role of the United Nations information centres in disseminating information about the Organization, the centres should have the necessary financial resources to carry out their work. Recalling its position on the question of integrating the information centres with

UNDP offices, his delegation once again declared that, in accordance with the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly, a precondition for such integration should be the preservation of the independence of those centres and the effectiveness of their work. The question of integration should be resolved on a case-by-case basis, taking into account the views of the Member States in which those centres were located. At the next meeting of the Committee on Information, the Secretary-General would present a report on the first steps with regard to integrating the information centres, and the consideration of that report would be of great importance.

13. Objective information, taking into account the social and cultural characteristics of various peoples, would undoubtedly help strengthen relations between countries. However, the use of information for political purposes, particularly to undermine sovereignty and interfere in the internal affairs of other countries, should be prohibited by the international community. As indicated in the resolution adopted recently by the First Committee, information technologies and means could be used for purposes that were inconsistent with the objectives of ensuring international stability and security. The resolution embodied the idea, fully supported by his delegation, that the use of information resources or technologies for criminal or terrorist purposes must be prevented.

14. That idea was directly related to Cuba's repeated comments in the Committee on Information and the Fourth Committee about the electronic war which was being waged against it. Every week over 1,953 hours of radio and television broadcasts were transmitted to Cuba from the territory of the United States of America, which spent over US$ 22 million a year on that electronic war against Cuba. Those actions not only undermined Cuba's sovereignty, but also ran counter to the most elementary norms of international law and the rules established by the International Telecommunication Union. Those broadcasts distorted the real situation in Cuba, and directly aided subversive and terrorist actions against Cuba. His delegation once again condemned that aggression and rejected the attempts of the United States of America to determine what kind of information the Cubans should receive; in that connection Cuba would continue to take the necessary steps to counter that electronic war.

15. **Mr. Osei** (Ghana) said that in view of the expanding role of the United Nations in international affairs and the increasing interest of the peoples of the world in its activities, the work of the Department of Public Information was of critical importance. The Department had been established out of the conviction that the Organization would not be able to pursue its objectives successfully unless the people of the world were fully informed of its objectives. The expanding responsibilities of the United Nations in the maintenance of international peace and security, the development of friendly relations among nations and the promotion of international cooperation highlighted the strategic role that the Department should play in building public support for the Organization.

16. In that regard, his delegation noted that the Department was paying increasing attention to the subject of sustainable economic and social development in the work of the Organization. Ghana was convinced that sustainable development held the key to global peace, and therefore appreciated the Department's focus of raising the profile of the African continent in the media. Examples were the prominent coverage in the world press of the report of the Secretary-General to the General Assembly on the causes of conflict and the promotion of durable peace and sustainable development in Africa and the Department's information campaign in connection with President Clinton's recent visit to Africa. The Department had also made an important contribution by publicizing information about Africa at the recent Tokyo Conference on African Development.

17. Ghana noted the Department's role in support of United Nations efforts to maintain international peace and security through the observance of the fiftieth anniversary of United Nations peacekeeping, support for field missions, and the preparation of materials for posting on the Internet. Ghana also appreciated the Department's efforts to harness new information technologies, which were growing extremely rapidly, and expected the Department to be at the forefront, particularly through the United Nations information centres in developing countries. It was only when those countries were assisted in acquiring new information technologies that the Department would be able to rely on their local resources for the dissemination of information on the Organization. Ghana noted that traditional means of information, such as the press, radio and television, would remain for a long time the primary media for many countries, and that the use of such means should under no circumstances be reduced. Ghana renewed its call for the establishment of a new world information and communication order. If the developing countries were left too far behind in entering the new information superhighway, that would perpetuate the inequalities which already existed between the North and the South in the field of social and economic development.

18. Ghana attached great importance to the activities of the United Nations information centres in Ghana and

elsewhere. The centres could do their job more effectively if they were given adequate resources. In that connection, he welcomed the strategic steps taken by the centres over the previous year to enhance their dissemination of information about the Organization's work. The provision of technical equipment and staff training to broaden information outreach to local audiences was commendable. Similarly, the Dag Hammarskjöld Library was crucial to the work of many delegations, particularly those that did not have the latest technology at their disposal. The expansion of the Library's facilities, such as the creation of an electronic news service about the United Nations, the training programme in electronic information retrieval and the electronic dissemination of the most important information to Governments and staff by electronic mail, was significantly increasing information delivery from the Department of Public Information.

19. **Mr. Vu Tran Phong** (Viet Nam) said that his delegation fully associated itself with the statement by the representative of Indonesia speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. At a time of change and reform and of enormous advances in the field of communications and information, the United Nations had, as never before, clearly demonstrated the link between peace, security and development. In his delegation's view, the maintenance of international peace and security and the promotion of economic and social development were the Organization's two principal tasks. Information had a crucial role to play in that regard and therefore so did the activities of the Department of Public Information. He welcomed the Department's internal reform efforts, including diversification of its media outreach, which should help promote a more balanced and equitable information system.

20. His delegation recognized the importance of revitalizing the work of the United Nations system in the field of information and informatics and also the important role played by the information centres in providing information about the Organization's activities in Member States. Concerning the integration of the information centres with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) offices, his delegation shared the views of the Group of 77 and China that it should be done on a case-by-case basis and taking the view of the host country into account. Also, the views of the Member States must be taken into account in developing proposals on restructuring the information centres and in the Secretary-General's establishment of regional hubs.

21. His delegation was concerned about the great disparity between the developing and the developed countries in the communication and information field resulting from the developing countries' lack of the necessary infrastructure and technology. The international community and the United Nations should strive to do away with that imbalance, and the primary task in that regard was to render technical assistance to the developing countries for improving their communication systems. The Organization as a whole and the Department of Public Information in particular must play a key role in narrowing the gap by disseminating accurate information about the Organization's work amongst Member States. Only when technical assistance and accurate information were provided, would it be possible to establish a new, more just and more effective world information and communication order that would respect the cultural and social values and the identity and sovereignty of all States.

22. His delegation reaffirmed its commitment to South-South cooperation in the field of information and communication and called on the developed countries to help the developing countries build communication infrastructures to narrow the gap in that regard. Although it was important for the Organization to use the Internet, traditional media remained indispensable. Radio broadcasting remained the most direct and cost-effective medium for reaching audiences throughout the world, especially in the developing countries, and in that connection his delegation had taken note of the Department's plan to launch a pilot international radio broadcasting plan before the end of the current year. Lastly, he stressed that information had an important role to play in promoting peace and international understanding and that the public information efforts of the United Nations should focus on that aim.

23. **Mr. Kouliev** (Azerbaijan) said that his country attached great importance to free access to and free distribution of information. As a newly independent State that had taken the democratic path only recently, Azerbaijan viewed information freedom as a tool for promoting the principles of liberalism and transparency. Consequently, in implementation of that policy, the leadership of Azerbaijan had invited to its recent presidential elections about 300 observers from various international organizations, who had attested to the fact that a free choice had been made by Azerbaijan's people. On the eve of the election campaign, President Aliyev had signed a decree abolishing censorship completely. Currently, about 500 different publishing houses reflecting the whole spectrum of Azerbaijan's political and cultural life were registered and in operation there.

24. Azerbaijan fully supported the ideas and goals set out in the Secretary-General's report (A/53/509). One of the most important provisions of the new strategy was the strengthening of the Organization's ability to communicate

at the country and regional levels to ensure that the global messages of the United Nations both reflected and were tailored to national orientations. Thus, further strengthening the role of the United Nations information centres in the field was one important way to carry out the fundamental tasks set out in the Charter. His delegation noted the positive role played in Azerbaijan by those representing the Department of Public Information, who were doing important work in disseminating information there about the various areas of United Nations activity.

25. He supported the Secretary-General's view as reflected in the report that the print medium remained one of the principal means of influencing public opinion around the world. The work of regional representatives was promoting close cooperation with the United Nations system as a whole. The traditional mass media — press, radio and television — were especially important in the developing countries and countries with economies in transition. He supported the idea expressed in the report of establishing a United Nations international radio broadcasting capacity, while stressing the need to broadcast not only in English and French but also in the Organization's other official languages, which would significantly expand the channel's audience.

26. While welcoming the Department's efforts and noting its enormous advances in the electronic information field, his delegation believed it necessary to point out that, because of the manifold economic and financial problems faced by countries with economies in transition, the traditional mass media were still the principal sources of information there. Still, the Department should continue to pay a great deal of attention to assistance to and cooperation with developing countries and countries with economies in transition in the electronic information field as well. The Department's operational activities must also be strengthened, particularly at a time when crises and conflicts were becoming more acute.

27. Azerbaijan welcomed the significant progress made in the electronic information field and the corresponding library services. Internet access to United Nations documents in all official languages had enabled permanent missions and other official State offices to obtain useful information from the United Nations. In that connection, he noted also the importance of the activities of the Working Group on Informatics.

28. **Mr. Takasu** (Japan) said that, since the role which the mass media played in the contemporary world could not be overemphasized, the Department of Public Information, as the centre for all United Nations activities in the field of communication and information, must play a more active role in disseminating information about the Organization's work around the world by gaining the broad public support for it without which the Organization would not be able to function effectively. His delegation supported the goals set out in the Secretary-General's report (A/53/509): to permeate the Organization with the communications culture, develop a more effective communications strategy, disseminate relevant information in an effective, coordinated and timely manner and place the information and communications function at the heart of the Organization's strategy. In that connection, he welcomed the establishment of a Strategic Communications Planning Group, which was discussed in the report of the Secretary-General to the Committee on Information on the implementation of the measures regarding information and communications (A/AC.198/1998/2), and which had already started work, and the appointment to the Office of the Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information of a Director to head the Information Technology Section. Those measures could strengthen the exchange of ideas at the strategic and tactical levels and help formulate a communications strategy to be adopted by all parts of the United Nations system. The Department of Public Information would necessarily play a leading role in that process. In view of the rapid changes that were constantly taking place in the international arena, the Department must have the flexibility to adjust its emphasis and orientations to emerging situations and must also have the resources to do so. Further, the Department must be able to respond promptly to feedback from its audience so as to ensure that the information which it provided was always both relevant and understandable.

29. As the Secretary-General's report indicated, the advent of the Internet as the "fourth" medium, in addition to the press, radio and television, had opened up unprecedented avenues for communication, and every effort should be made to use it in providing the public with information about United Nations activities. A two-way flow of information would enable people to understand those activities better and gain a better grasp of how those activities were relevant to them. In that connection, his delegation supported the Department's introduction of online chat channels to United Nations experts on various issues. Work must also continue on the United Nations Web site so that the media around the world could make better use of the information posted on it.

30. At the same time, the traditional means of disseminating information, such as radio and television, would continue to be important into the next century. Thus, from 18 to 20 November 1998, the Permanent Mission of

Japan would join in sponsoring the World Television Forum, during which the Japanese Broadcasting Corporation (NHK) would demonstrate high-definition television to the United Nations. The importance of radio could not be overstated, especially for the developing countries, because of its low cost and wide availability; his delegation therefore looked forward to the report of the Secretary-General on the pilot project to revive direct broadcasts by United Nations Radio.

31. Direct contact between the United Nations and local communities was extremely important. Thus, the United Nations Information Centre in Tokyo was effectively enhancing public awareness in Japan of United Nations activities, which was very important for maintaining support there for them. During the Secretary-General's recent visit to Japan, the Academic Council for the United Nations had been established there to promote support for the Organization. The new organization would supplement the activities of the 43 branches of the United Nations Association of Japan in ensuring public support for the Organization's activities. He expressed the hope that the Department of Public Information would develop its activities in Japan in cooperation with those associations. In that context, the Department must be provided with sufficient resources, and his delegation opposed any arbitrary, percentage reductions in the Department's budget, believing that each activity should be reviewed regularly on the basis of its relevance and effectiveness.

32. **Ms. Ho** (Singapore) said that, as the Secretary-General had stated in his report (A/53/509), technological progress had perhaps had its most profound impact in the communications and information field, with the Internet leading the information revolution. The convergence of telecommunications, computer and broadcasting technologies would have an even greater impact on the way information was transmitted. Faster and more powerful telecommunication networks now enabled data to be sent in milliseconds, whereas television provided access to varied forms of information from almost everywhere. Contemporary satellite systems were making it possible for people to make calls from any part of the world to any other.

33. The Internet, which was often called the "fourth" medium after the press, radio and television, was helping annihilate distance between societies and nations. Although the traditional mass media retained their importance as societies' main information channel, the information technology revolution was changing the way people lived and worked: now, people with access to a computer could not only use all the world's information, they could provide it too. However, as it was a global, transboundary phenomenon, the Internet did pose certain problems of harmful content and influences that conflicted with the traditions and values of particular societies. Countries felt powerless in the face of those problems because the growth of cyberspace was uncontrolled. Instead of resisting change, States should rather adapt to the new ways of doing things to keep some control over the general direction of technological progress.

34. The very survival of Singapore, a small country with an open economy, depended on its ability to adapt to the changes taking place around the world. Singapore was building its own information superhighway to link up with the other information superhighways of the world. The Internet industry was experiencing strong growth: currently, the Internet employed 500,000 people in Singapore, up from 240,000 in 1996, out of a population of 3 million. The number of Web sites had also shot up, from 900 in 1996 to 4,000 in 1998. In its Internet-related activities, Singapore was seeking to make use of the principle of industry self-regulation. The fundamental responsibility for information content going onto the Internet must lie with the leaders of the industry. Both the content-related and the technological aspects of the Internet were regulated on the basis of a set of minimum standards rather than by imposing any censorship limitations. One of the requirements was to bar access to about 100 very specific undesirable sites; the Internet Code of Practice outlined what the community found offensive or harmful to Singapore's racial and religious harmony. Although, so far, no punitive action had been taken against anyone in the industry, the mere possibility of punishment for prohibited activities seemed to have a certain deterrent effect. Singapore was encouraging the industry to regulate itself and take its own initiatives against harmful content and viruses. Singapore supported content classification according to international standard guidelines, and every Internet service provider was required to offer, as an option for parents, a sanitized version of the Internet called the "Family Access Network". The "family" services would prevent access to undesirable information by allowing parents to specify what sites their children could access. However, as the Internet was a transnational phenomenon, it was necessary to impose such regulation at the international level too, which would also help combat other transboundary crimes in cyberspace.

35. **Mr. Skrypko** (Belarus) said that the National Committee to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which had been set up by decree of the President of Belarus, was carrying out a wide range measures to publicize human rights and enhance awareness in that area by involving the country's major mass media. The National Assembly of Belarus had

held extensive parliamentary hearings on human rights problems, and appropriate recommendations had been formulated on the basis of those hearings; in particular, provision had been made for the preparation of a National Plan of Action in the human rights field and for harmonizing the relevant legislation.

36. In that context, the Belarusian delegation supported the Secretary-General's reform proposals on reorienting the Organization's activities in the information area and thoroughly approved of the measures to introduce a culture of communications throughout the Organization's activities, place the information function at the very heart of the Organization's strategic management, strengthen the role of the Department of Public Information and strengthen also the Organization's ability to communicate at the country and regional levels. In his delegation's opinion, the reform of the information sector should be carried out in close cooperation with the States Members of the Organization, in the first instance through the Committee on Information, and taking into account national interests, but without prejudice to the Department's priority programmes which had already been approved.

37. It was important to strengthen activities highlighting the practical difficulties which countries with economies in transition were facing along the road towards integrating themselves into the global economy and implementing their democratic transformations. By focusing on problems specific to the transition period, the Department of Public Information could play an important role in mobilizing international assistance to help those countries achieve sustainable development in the social, economic, environmental and other fields. The Government of Belarus thought highly of the activities being carried out by the information component of the United Nations office in Minsk, with whose cooperation the Centre for United Nations Studies in Belarus had been set up. Given the increasing volume of work resulting from the increase in interest on the part of the people of Belarus in the Organization's activities, his delegation believed that that component's capacity should be enhanced.

38. His delegation believed that it was vitally necessary to continue and redouble the efforts by the Department and other parts of the United Nations system, in particular the United Nations Humanitarian Assistance Coordination Unit, in the area of long-term post-Chernobyl information activities with a view to mobilizing international assistance to eliminate the ever-increasing consequences of the disaster. The task of increasing the world community's awareness of the humanitarian, medical and environmental consequences of that nuclear accident must be made part of the mandate of a reformed Department of Public Information that would be capable of making a substantive contribution to eliminating the "Chernobyl fatigue" that had recently taken shape amongst the donor countries, and was adversely affecting the further financing of the rehabilitation projects that had been developed by the Organization. The creation of a special Chernobyl section on the United Nations home page, with information on the activities being carried out by the Organization and the affected States to minimize the effects of the accident, might be a major step in that direction. Interested countries could assist the Department of Public Information in that matter by providing the relevant information.

39. His delegation had examined with interest the Secretary-General's proposal to establish an international broadcasting service for United Nations Radio and believed that during implementation of the pilot project and, most importantly, in the start-up phase of the direct broadcasting service itself, the principle of the Organization's linguistic diversity must be respected. He particularly emphasized the importance of establishing a direct broadcast capacity in Russian, a language used by an audience of many millions in the many countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States, including Belarus. In determining the target regions for broadcasting live programmes, the assumption should be that the degree of interest in United Nations Radio programmes — like that in information materials that used other forms of mass media such as the press and television — would be highest primarily in countries where there was limited access to the latest communications technologies such as the Internet. That lack of access was a particularly pressing problem for States with economies in transition and the developing countries.

40. **Mr. Zohar** (Israel) stressed that Israel, as a democratic republic, upheld freedom of speech and information and, despite the difficulties its situation posed, did not restrict freedom of the press. Currently, a dozen newspapers in Hebrew and several in other languages, including Arabic and English, appeared regularly, as did over 1,000 periodicals. Private stations competed with State-controlled radio, and Israeli television viewers had unrestricted access to global television channels through cable networks. Free access to the Internet was not just guaranteed, it was encouraged. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs had its own Web site with information about the peace process in all its aspects. Israel supported freedom of access to information throughout the world and respected the right and duty of journalists to go about their business. Journalists in Israel played an important role as watchdogs of democracy and protectors of human and consumer rights.

41. **Ms. Durrant** (Jamaica) speaking on behalf of the 14 States members of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) that were also States Members of the United Nations, said that CARICOM associated itself with the statement made on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. Over the previous two decades, thanks to technological progress in the information field, the world had become much more close-knit. The information revolution was the key to the future of the developing countries: access to information, in essence, made possible better education, improved health care and increased competitiveness and allowed people to play a more active role in the world's affairs. In that connection, the CARICOM countries fully supported the efforts of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and other bodies in the United Nations system to improve access to information and information technology, especially in developing countries. The communications function must be placed at the heart of the Organization's strategic management. Equally important was the emphasis on developing a culture of communications throughout the Organization. In that connection she applauded the efforts of the Department of Public Information, the Working Group on Informatics and the Dag Hammarskjöld Library aimed at making use of the whole vast array of information resources. The flow of information coming to permanent missions through the Internet was making it possible to enhance communications between missions and the Secretariat.

42. A number of aspects of the Secretary-General's report (A/53/509) which related to increasing public awareness of the Organization's activities were of importance to the CARICOM Member States. She therefore noted with satisfaction the public information programme that had been undertaken in connection with the June 1998 special session of the General Assembly on the world drug problem. CARICOM looked forward to a similar programme in connection with the special session to review the Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States. The focus on enhancing links between the United Nations, the media and broad sectors of civil society was certainly a step in the right direction. CARICOM welcomed the creation of the Strategic Communications Planning Group, which would strengthen links with the media, non-governmental organizations, academia, the business community and young people.

43. CARICOM welcomed the efforts of the Department of Public Information and other Secretariat units which were currently working together to plan and implement information campaigns and focus attention on newsmaking aspects of the Organization's work. However, it was concerned that the information produced by the Department seemed to be no match for the flood of negative and inaccurate information often produced by the external media. The Department should examine the possibility of entering into more active cooperation arrangements with State and private media companies to produce more documentaries which could be aired on national and international television channels. The Department should capitalize on the uniqueness of the Organization's activities by disseminating information about those activities to a wider audience. Other public information measures too were encouraging, such as the broadening in scope of the daily briefings by the Office of the Spokesman of the Secretary-General.

44. Alongside the three traditional media — the press, radio and television — the United Nations should take full advantage of the Internet, the new "fourth" mass medium. Her delegation was pleased to note the plans for a new media page on the United Nations Web site, the substantial increase in the volume of multimedia postings, the introduction of online chat channels to United Nations experts and an expansion in sales and marketing of United Nations publications and materials. She noted the success of the United Nations Web site, where the number of hits in 1998 had been twice the 1997 figure. The "Cyber School Bus" project, which targeted thousands of schoolchildren in over 60 countries, had become an effective tool for promoting the Organization's activities amongst young people.

45. Radio was perhaps the most cost-effective of the mass media. In that connection, the creation of a United Nations international radio broadcasting capacity was a worthwhile notion. The activities of the Caribbean Radio Unit had improved awareness amongst Caribbean people of United Nations activities which impacted on their region. She had no doubt that that Unit should have its opportunities for direct radio broadcasting augmented. At the same time, greater human and financial resources needed to be allocated to the regional centres so that the demand for information about the United Nations could be properly satisfied. CARICOM supported full programming in French and Creole for the people of Haiti and wished to see more United Nations television stations with multi-channel capability, particularly in the developing countries. The Caribbean region in particular could benefit from additional direct linkages between United Nations Television and television stations in the region.

46. The work of the United Nations information centres was extremely important: in 1998, they had helped give high-visibility coverage to a whole range of United Nations

events. However, they must give greater emphasis to issues of concern to the developing countries, such as external debt, poverty eradication and sustainable economic development. The CARICOM member countries again stressed the need for an information officer in the UNDP office in Jamaica, which served the northern Caribbean. The information officer would complement the work of the United Nation Information Centre in Port-of-Spain, which had responsibility for the widely dispersed territories of the Caribbean.

47. **Mr. Chirila** (Romania) said that his delegation associated itself with the statement made on behalf of the European Union and associated States. The great importance Romania attached to United Nations activities in information field sprang from an awareness of the effectiveness of information as a means of mobilizing Governments and civil society in all countries behind the cause of peace, development and human rights. For the same reason, his delegation shared the view that the United Nations should be projected as an open and transparent organization that was accessible to all, and so the communications function was not just a support function but an integral part of the Organization's programme. His delegation therefore supported the Secretary-General's conceptual framework in respect of communications and information policies and programmes submitted to the Committee on Information at its twentieth session.

48. The Department of Public Information, as the Organization's focal point for information and communications, should be strengthened. His delegation was therefore pleased to see that notion reflected in the report of the Secretary-General (A/53/509) and also in draft resolution B from the Committee on Information, which emphasized that the Department should maintain and improve its activities in areas of special interest to the developing countries and others with special needs, including countries with economies in transition.

49. The Romanian delegation recognized the importance of the United Nations information centres, and considered that there were two points of particular significance. First, it was concerned about the fact that the functional autonomy of the information centres was not always respected and therefore welcomed the consensus at the latest session of the Committee on Information that future integration exercises should be carried out cost-effectively and on a case-by-case basis, taking into account the views of the host countries and without adversely affecting the centres' information functions and autonomy. Second, the Romanian Government continued to attach particular importance to the work of the United Nations Information Centre in Bucharest, one of the first information centres established by the United Nations. Unfortunately, over the years financial and material support for the Bucharest Centre from the Department of Public Information had gradually dropped. His delegation again appealed to the Department to consider adequate solutions to redress the situation, and expressed its belief that in satisfying requests from various Governments to open new centres, existing centres should not be neglected.

50. **Mr. Yousefi** (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that his delegation associated itself with the statement made by the representative of Indonesia on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. Information was a dynamic force for cross-cultural understanding, education and broader participation by people in making the decisions that affected their lives. Some developed countries, thanks to their technological advancement, enjoyed a virtual monopoly in the distribution of information that left the developing countries on the sidelines. Information should not undermine cultural and moral values, distort facts or demonstrate bias towards other countries. An illustration of that argument was the violation of a country's sovereignty by radio and television transmissions directed specifically against that country for political and subversive ends. In that connection, the need to ensure impartiality and balance, improve the information and communications infrastructure of the developing countries by transferring advanced information technology to them and expanding their access to information was more imperative than ever, and to do so a new world information and communications order would have to be established and implemented.

51. The efforts by the Department of Public Information to reflect linguistic diversity in the information it produced were commendable. In that regard, the Department should diversify its programmes to include the languages of the great cultures and civilizations, including Farsi, which was spoken in a number of countries, including the Islamic Republic of Iran. By the same token, linguistic diversity should be applied to broadcasts by United Nations Radio, in order to reach a worldwide audience and serve the interests of all regions. An equally important aspect of the pilot international broadcasting project for United Nations Radio should be partnership with national radio broadcasting networks. It was to be hoped that the Department would provide additional information on the project for consideration at the forthcoming session of the Committee on Information. One of the main objectives of reorienting the Organization's information activities was to expand its capacity to communicate at the country level, and that gave the United Nations information centres an important role to play. He emphasized that in the process of restructuring the

information centres and establishing new regional hubs, the views of Member States must be given due consideration. Relations between the information centres and their host countries might include contacts and cooperation with civil society organizations such as media agencies and educational and research institutions.

52. He applauded the use of new technologies, in particular the Internet, to disseminate information on the global scale. However, the Department should continue disseminating information through the traditional media and should provide hard copy to meet the needs of countries with less advanced technology.

The meeting rose at 5.15 p.m.